



Hopkins, D. (2019). 'Mr Vernon', translator of Ovid. *Notes and Queries*, 66(1), 96-100. <https://doi.org/10.1093/notesj/gjy196>

Peer reviewed version

License (if available):
Other

Link to published version (if available):
[10.1093/notesj/gjy196](https://doi.org/10.1093/notesj/gjy196)

[Link to publication record in Explore Bristol Research](#)
PDF-document

This is the accepted author manuscript (AAM). The final published version (version of record) is available online via OUP at <https://doi.org/10.1093/notesj/gjy196> . Please refer to any applicable terms of use of the publisher.

University of Bristol - Explore Bristol Research

General rights

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the reference above. Full terms of use are available:
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-policy/pure/user-guides/ebr-terms/>

‘Mr Vernon’, Translator of Ovid

One of the most notable literary publications of 1717 was *Ovid’s Metamorphoses in Fifteen Books, Translated by the Most Eminent Hands*, the first of the two luxurious folios¹ which were to mark the end of the illustrious publishing career of Jacob Tonson the Elder (1655-1736). This volume, which was edited by the poet and physician, Sir Samuel Garth, was partly designed as a posthumous tribute to John Dryden, all of whose translations from the *Metamorphoses* are collected within it, together with versions of other episodes by seventeen other poets, including Joseph Addison, William Congreve, John Gay, Alexander Pope, Nahum Tate, and Garth himself. Among the lesser known contributors (of six episodes from Book VIII)² was a ‘Mr Vernon’. The purpose of the present note is to clarify the identity of this person, and to clear away some of the confusions which have led him to be wrongly identified and incorrectly described in a number of printed sources.

First, the facts of the case, which can (despite some minor discrepancies between otherwise reliable sources) be established with some certainty.³ The ‘Mr Vernon’ of Garth’s *Metamorphoses* was Rev. Edward Vernon (1669?-1742/3), to whom I shall refer hereafter, for reasons of clarity, as Edward ‘Ovid’ Vernon. Edward ‘Ovid’ Vernon was born at Sudbury, Derbyshire, the son of John Vernon, the younger brother of Colonel Edward Vernon, one of Charles II’s so-called 1649 Officers, who had been granted the Manor of Clontarf, County Dublin for services rendered to the King preceding the Restoration. Edward ‘Ovid’ Vernon was educated at Westminster School and was admitted (aged 16) as a sizar of St John’s College Cambridge on 13 February 1685/6. He matriculated in 1686, but seems not to have taken a Cambridge degree. He was awarded a Lambeth MA in 1698, and served for forty four years (1678-1742) as Rector of Redmile, Leicestershire, dying there at the age of 72.⁴ His wife (a long-suffering lady, as we shall see) was called Laetitia (*anglice* Lettice), and was the daughter of John Bankes of Uttoxeter, Staffordshire. She died in 1719. Edward

‘Ovid’ Vernon had three other sons: John, who inherited the family seat of Clontarf,⁵ Edward, and George (bap. 17 February 1706).⁶ He also had a daughter, Catherine, who married Charles Yeates (also spelled ‘Yates’), and, after Yeates’s early death, a Rev. Samuel North.

Edward Vernon Jnr, Edward ‘Ovid’ Vernon’s second son, was admitted (aged 18) as a pensioner to Trinity College Cambridge on 1 July 1713. Educated at Uttoxeter School, he matriculated in 1713-14, was made a scholar of Trinity in 1715, took his BA in 1716-17, his MA in 1720, and a DD in 1728. He became a Fellow of Trinity in 1719 and a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1723. Ordained deacon on 22 June, 1718, and priest on 31 May 1724, he served as Rector of St George’s, Bloomsbury, from 1731 until his death in March, 1761.⁷ A letter from Edward ‘Ovid’ Vernon to Edward Vernon Jnr of 23 April 1736 is preserved in the Stowe MSS in the British Library.⁸ Edward Vernon Jnr’s will shows that he inherited many of his father’s papers and (annotated) books, which, it is said, displayed Edward ‘Ovid’ Vernon’s ‘uncommon Learning, parts and abilities’.

There has been considerable confusion in the printed record about the identity of Edward ‘Ovid’ Vernon. Here I must frankly confess my own contribution to the muddle. In an article on the genesis and compilation of Garth’s *Metamorphoses*, published in *The Review of English Studies* in 1988,⁹ I listed among the contributors to the translation ‘Thomas Vernon’, presumably on the assumption that the ‘Mr Vernon’ of the Garth translation was the only ‘Vernon’ of the period who was sufficiently distinguished to merit an entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography* (as it then was), and whose dates seemed to fit: the lawyer and politician Thomas Vernon (1654-1721). ‘Mr Vernon’ is also referred to as ‘Thomas Vernon’ in the only book-length study of the Garth *Metamorphoses*, by Richard Morton.¹⁰ ‘Thomas Vernon’ is also the name given to ‘Mr Vernon’ in Stephen Bernard’s edition of *The Literary Correspondence of the Tonsons*,¹¹ and in early printings of Garth Tissol’s edition of

the Garth *Metamorphoses* in the Wordsworth Classics series (1998), which explicitly identifies ‘Mr Vernon’ as ‘the law reporter Thomas Vernon (1654-1721)’. Since my article appears in the bibliographies of Bernard’s, Morton’s, and Tissol’s books, it may, I think, be fairly inferred that they derived their false identification of ‘Mr Vernon’ as ‘Thomas Vernon’ from me. Vernon’s forename also appeared as ‘Thomas’ in books by Liz Oakley-Brown, Tim Richardson, and Pat Rogers from the early 2000s.¹²

In 1974, John F. Sena published an edition of ‘The Letters of Samuel Garth’ in *The Bulletin of the New York Public Library*.¹³ This edition contains (as its Letter XXVI) a letter from Garth to ‘To the Reverend Vernon’ preserved in BL Stowe MS 155 – by chance, together with a letter from Tonson to Vernon,¹⁴ the only record that we have of either the editor’s or publisher’s transactions with any of the contributors to *Ovid’s Metamorphoses*. At the time of compiling his edition, Sena gave no forename for Vernon, and seems not to have realized that the letter from Garth to Vernon referred to the Ovid translation. But when he revised his edition of Garth’s letters for inclusion in his book, *The Best-Natured Man: Sir Samuel Garth, Physician and Poet* (New York: AMS Press, 1986), he expanded his commentary, both to acknowledge that Letter XXVI refers to the Garth *Metamorphoses*, and to supply the forename ‘James’ for ‘The Reverend Vernon’.¹⁵ In both cases, he was drawing on the work of Richard I. Cook, who, in his study of Garth for the Twayne’s English Authors series (1980), had (correctly) realized that Garth’s letter refers to the Ovid translation, but who had (incorrectly) given ‘Mr Vernon’ (p. 122), for reasons which he did not explain, the forename ‘James’. In later printings of his Wordsworth Classics Introduction, Garth Tissol, clearly following Cook, altered his ‘Thomas’ to ‘James’, replacing his earlier identification of ‘Mr Vernon’ with the ‘law reporter Thomas Vernon’ with a reference to ‘the clergyman James Vernon’. The Rector of Redmile, Leicestershire, however – as the Stowe MSS identify

Rev. Vernon – was called ‘Edward’, not ‘Thomas’ or ‘James’, as is reliably testified by his memorial in Redmile church and elsewhere.

Further confusions about the identity of ‘Mr Vernon’ have been perpetuated in the alumni lists of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. *Alumni Oxonienses* (*AO*) correctly reports Edward ‘Ovid’ Vernon’s Rectorship of Redmile, but conflates two different Edward Vernons in its entry, confusing Edward ‘Ovid’ Vernon, with another Edward Vernon ‘of Stoke Milborough, Salop., gent.’, who matriculated at Balliol College on 31 May 1677, aged 17, took his BA at All Souls College on 22 February 1680-1, and was married to Mary Butler, of St Margaret Lothbury in 1687. Since we know, first, that Edward ‘Ovid’ Vernon was born in 1669 or 1670 (thus making the matriculation date recorded in *AO* impossibly early) and, secondly, that Edward ‘Ovid’ Vernon’s wife was called Laetitia/Lettice not Mary, *AO*’s conflation of the two quite different, albeit near-contemporary, ‘Edward Vernons’ is clear. *AO*, moreover, bestows upon its ‘Edward Vernon’ a Lambeth MA of 1698 (the only such degree awarded that year, according to Lambeth Palace records). But this degree, as is pointed out in *Alumni Cantabrigienses* (*AC*), was actually conferred not on the ‘contemporary namesake’ listed in *AO*, but on Edward ‘Ovid’ Vernon, for whom *AC* supplies matriculation details which tally with the details recorded elsewhere of his life and career. *AC*, however, though it records Edward ‘Ovid’ Vernon’s position as Chaplain to the Duke of Rutland, whose seat was at Belvoir Castle, omits mention of his position as Rector of the nearby Redmile.

Further information about the literary activities and personal character of Edward ‘Ovid’ Vernon can be derived from a number of sources. A poem of his, addressed ‘To Sir Samuel Garth, Upon his Being Made a Physician to the King, 1715’, preserved in BL Stowe MS 155, ff. 98^r – 99^v, expresses his annoyance that ‘shuffling chance has thrown/From what he lik’d, the learned, and the Town,/And forced to preach neglected and obscure/To snoring

Bumpkins in a Country Cure', and begs Garth to help him find literary patronage which will allow his talents a more satisfactory expression than was afforded by his duties as a provincial clergyman. Edward 'Ovid' Vernon also seems the likeliest candidate for the 'Mr Vernon' who supplied translations of 'The Images. Being the Image of a compleat Woman both in Mind and Virtue' and 'A Defence of the Images, the just Rule of Praise' for Volume 2 of *The Works of Lucian, Translated from the Greek by Several Eminent Hands* (1710). That volume was 'Printed for Samuel Briscoe, and Sold by James Woodward'. But in his letter to Vernon mentioned above Tonson refers to himself as Vernon's 'old Bookseller', which seems to suggest that Tonson had published material by Vernon before his contributions to *Ovid's Metamorphoses*. In 1706 and 1707, two poems by Vernon were published in London: *Corona Civica. A Poem to the Right Honourable the Lord-Keeper of the Great Seal of England*,¹⁶ and *The Union. A Poem, Inscrib'd to the Right Honourable Lord Marquis of Granby, One of Her Majesty's Commissioners for the Scotch Union*. The publishers of the two poems are given as John Nutt and J. Morphew respectively. But the two poems were later included in *A Collection of Poems, Occasionally Written Upon the Victories of Blenheim and Ramillies. By the Most Eminent Hands. Now Published in One Volume in Folio, For Jacob Tonson, 1708*. This (now extremely rare)¹⁷ nonce collection perhaps justifies Tonson's suggestion that he had acted as Vernon's 'Bookseller' before inviting him to contribute to the *Garth Metamorphoses*.

A different, and less decorous, side of Edward 'Ovid' Vernon is apparent in his reported behaviour while Rector of Redmile. A letter from the Bishop of Worcester of 6 March 1703/4, has been preserved in the Diary of Francis Evans, the Bishop's secretary, in which the bishop protests about the 'idle' and 'drunken' conduct of Thomas Woodcock, whom Vernon, having 'my L^d Rutland's P^rsentation to the Vicarage of Pillerton in Warwickshire' 'by a Sequestration' had hired in Leicestershire to 'serve' the 'Cure' of that

parish. The bishop describes Vernon as ‘a riddle of a man’, and speaks of the ‘supine negligence’, ‘humor’ and ‘Lusts’ which have impeded the proper exercise of his clerical duties. ‘I pity yo^r poor wife and children’, the bishop concludes, ‘but much more yo^rself, to whom God has given good gifts for better purposes than you apply them to.’¹⁸

In his study of *The Parish Clergy under the Later Stuarts: The Leicestershire Experience*¹⁹ John H. Pruett, drawing on manuscript records preserved in the Leicester Museum, Christ Church Oxford, and Lambeth Palace Library, offers a further, graphic, account of the behaviour of the man whom he describes as Leicestershire’s ‘most spectacular clerical sinner’. A lengthy quotation from Pruett is necessary to convey the full outrageousness of Vernon’s recorded conduct and utterances:

In September, 1707, [Vernon] was observed by several persons at Waltham fair to be “more than ordinarily free and familiar” with Elizabeth George, a serving woman. When they left the fair together, they were followed by suspicious neighbors to a field and discovered “in a very undecent and suspitious posture... she lying upon her back with her clothes up and [he] with [his] breeches down, upon her, comitting the abominable Sin of adultery or Incontinency with her.” Several witnesses later admitted that a heavy rain made it hard to see just what Vernon was doing – and even Vernon himself was not sure, for, as he later confessed, drunkenness had clouded his memory of what had happened that fateful night. But he and Elizabeth George were hardly strangers: he had often been seen to “kiss, hugg, and embrace” her at the public house in Melton Mowbray where she worked. Witnesses in fact testified that he had crept up the public house stairs one night “in the dark in hopes to find the said Elizabeth in bed wherein he thought she lay.” Unfortunately, he had entered the wrong bedroom, and had begun to be “very free with the person in bed, who proveing to be a man and awaked out of his sleep by his the said Edward’s actions towards him,

ask'd who was there and what they would have or to what purpose, upon which the said Edward Vernon, perceiving his mistake, made out of the chamber as fast as he could."

When Vernon begged Bishop Wake to extricate him from his adultery trial, Wake refused to help him. The Bishop indignantly noted that when Vernon came to see him he "rambled after his usual manner and was full of complaints against others, but knew nothing amiss in Himselfe." For his part, Archdeacon Rogers thought Vernon a man "of so much learning and so little discretion that I never met with the like." He was appalled that Vernon seemed to "have no remorse, and when he came to see me at night, he smelt so strongly of drink that his breath was noisome." Vernon had other influential clerical friends who eventually won him a pardon, but he never won the forgiveness of his patron, the Duke of Rutland. Their relations were hardly improved when Vernon's son²⁰ shot one of the Duke's deer near Belvoir Castle. When the Duke demanded Vernon's dog in return, Vernon insolently retorted that his son would keep the dog to "pisse upon the Duke of Rutland's grave," and that the "surly old fellow of Belvoir Castle" was but a "pittifull Shitten Turd of a Duke." The Duke wrote Wake beseeching him to get Vernon out of Leicestershire, for he could not rest "easy or quiet in my own House with so troublesome a Person in my Neighbourhood." Vernon was temporarily suspended as morally unsound, but in 1712 he was back serving his parish, and he was still there in 1718.

Such, it appears, was the conduct of Edward 'Ovid' Vernon when he was not engaged on the learned pursuits which he seems to have so much preferred to his clerical duties, and for which he seems to have been more deservedly admired.

This note is deeply indebted to Ms Kathie Coblenz of the New York Public Library who first alerted me to the confusion surrounding the identity of ‘Mr Vernon’, and whose painstaking archival work has identified a number of salient facts relating to Vernon and his family, many of which are incorporated in what follows. I am also indebted to Ms Coblenz for transcriptions of the wills of Edward ‘Ovid’ Vernon, and Edward Vernon Jnr.

¹ The other was Tonson’s edition of Matthew Prior’s *Poems of Several Occasions* (1718).

² ‘The Transformation of the Naiads’, ‘Perimele turn’d into an Island’, ‘The Changes of Proteus’, ‘The Story of Erisichthon’, ‘The Description of Famine’, and ‘The Transformations of Erisichthon’s Daughter’.

³ My account draws on the following sources: The wills of Edward ‘Ovid’ Vernon (Public Record office Prob 11/726) and Edward Vernon Jnr (England and Wales, Prerogative Court of Canterbury Wills, 1384-1858; Prob 11: Will Registers 1757-1762 Piece 864: Choslyn, Quire Numbers 99-145 (1761); the British Library Catalogue of Stowe MSS; Online alumni lists of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge; John Nichols’s *History and Antiquities of the County of Leicestershire*, 4 vols. (London: John Nichols, 1795-1811) [contains a transcription of the memorials to Vernon and his wife in Redmile church which were removed during church refurbishment in the 1800s]; John O’Hart, account of the Vernon family, in *The Irish and Anglo-Irish Landed Gentry, When Cromwell Came to Ireland; Or, A Supplement to Irish Pedigrees* (Dublin: J. Duffey, M. H. Gill, 1892); *Burke’s Landed Gentry of Ireland* (1912 edn); online records of Lambeth Palace; *The Diary of Francis Evans, Secretary to Bishop Lloyd, 1699-1706*, ed. David Robertson (Oxford; J. Parker for the Worcestershire Historical Society, 1903); [Phillis Schach], *Grandmamma’s Recollections and Letters, Addressed to her Youngest Grandchild* (London, H. Broadbent [n.d., c. 1880]) [memoirs by Edward ‘Ovid’ Vernon’s great-granddaughter].

⁴ Vernon’s will refers to him as aged 75, but Kathie Coblenz speculates that this may well be a transcription error.

⁵ Colonel Edward Vernon died without male heirs, so the Clontarf estate passed to his younger brother, John, the father of Edward ‘Ovid’ Vernon. John’s eldest son, another John, should have inherited the estate, but died (unmarried), and the estate thus passed to his younger half-brother, Edward ‘Ovid’ Vernon. But Edward did not wish to move to Ireland, and away from his daughter, so made over the Clontarf property to his eldest son, John, on condition that he received ‘a moiety’ of the income from the estate.

⁶ George is not mentioned by O’Hart or Burke. Kathie Coblenz speculates that he probably died young, perhaps even predeceasing his mother.

⁷ O’Hart and Burke give his date of death incorrectly as 1765. O’Hart records that he died unmarried.

⁸ MS Stowe 748, f. 147.

⁹ ‘Dryden and the Garth-Tonson *Metamorphoses*’, *Review of English Studies*, New Series, 39 (1988), 64-74.

¹⁰ Richard Morton, *The English Enlightenment Reads Ovid: Dryden and Jacob Tonson’s 1717 ‘Metamorphoses’* (New York: AMS Press, 2013), pp. 147-8. In the only other full-length study of Garth’s *Metamorphoses* – ‘Profit, Poetry and Politics in Augustan Translation: A Study of the Tonson-Garth *Metamorphoses* of 1717’ (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Illinois, 1969) – Warren Francis Dwyer gives no forename for Vernon.

¹¹ *The Literary Correspondences of the Tonsons*, ed. Stephen Bernard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹² Liz Oakley Brown, *Ovid and the Cultural Politics of Translation in Early Modern England* (London: Ashgate, 2006). Tim Richardson, *The Arcadian Friends: Inventing the English Landscape Garden* (London: Bantam Press, 2007), and Pat Rogers *Pope and the Destiny of the Stuarts: History, Politics and Mythology in the Age of Queen Anne* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹³ John F. Sena, ‘The Letters of Samuel Garth’, *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 78 (1974), 69-94.

¹⁴ Letter of 22 November 1715, printed by Bernard, *Literary Correspondence of the Tonsons*, pp. 167-8.

¹⁵ Elsewhere in his book, however, in a footnote on p. 182, Sena refers to ‘Mr Vernon’ as ‘Thomas’.

¹⁶ *Corona Civica* – an irony in the present context – contains (p. 3) a passage in praise of the lawyer Thomas Vernon, whom (see above) I and others wrongly identified as the ‘Mr Vernon’ who translated Ovid.

¹⁷ A copy of the collection, from the library of William Congreve, was offered for sale by Sothebys in July 2017, as item 46 in their catalogue of *English Literature, History, Children’s Books and Illustrations, Including the Garrett Herman Collection*, with an estimate of £6,000 - £9,000.

¹⁸ See *The Diary of Francis Evans, Secretary to Bishop Lloyd, 1699-1706*, ed. David Robertson (Oxford; J. Parker for the Worcestershire Historical Society, 1903), pp. 97-98.

¹⁹ John H. Pruett, *The Parish Clergy Under the Later Stuarts: The Leicestershire Experience* (Urbana, Chicago, London: University of Illinois Press, 1978), pp. 129-30.

²⁰ Pruett assumes that this ‘son’ was Edward Vernon Jnr, the future DD and FRS, but it could, presumably, have been one or other of Edward ‘Ovid’ Vernon’s other sons, John or George.